

What is Claimed is

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1. A method to provide directory assistance to a caller attempting to place a telephone call to an unavailable telephone number, the method comprising the steps of:

 - detecting a caller's telephone call to an unavailable number;
 - intercepting the telephone call; and
 - automatically routing the telephone call to a directory assistance service.

2. The method of Claim 1, wherein the step of intercepting the telephone call includes intercepting the telephone call at a central office local to the caller.

3. The method of Claim 1, wherein the step of intercepting the telephone call includes intercepting the telephone call at a central office remote to the caller.

4. The method of Claim 1, wherein the directory assistance service is one of a group consisting of: a local directory service, a regional directory service, a national directory service, an international directory service, and a specialized directory service.

5. The method of Claim 1, further including the step of prompting the caller with an option of obtaining directory assistance for a fee.

6. The method of Claim 1, further including the step of providing directory assistance to the caller.

7. The method of Claim 6, wherein a fee is generated by the provision of the directory assistance to the caller.

8. The method of Claim 6, wherein the step of providing directory assistance includes the steps of:

 - determining information associated with the unavailable telephone number; and
 - taking an action based at least in part on the associated information.

9. The method of Claim 8, wherein the step of taking an action includes providing the information to the caller.

10. The method of Claim 8, wherein the step of determining information

includes determining information associated with an unavailable subscriber represented by the unavailable telephone number.

[c11] 11. The method of Claim 10, wherein the step of determining information further includes the step of determining information associated with at least one available subscriber having a classification at least similar to a classification of the unavailable subscriber.

[c12] 12. The method of Claim 6, further including the step of providing at least one advertisement to the caller.

[c13] 13. The method of Claim 12, wherein the at least one advertisement includes at least one generalized advertisement.

[c14] 14. The method of Claim 12, wherein the at least one advertisement includes at least one targeted advertisement.

[c15] 15. The method of Claim 14, wherein the at least one targeted advertisement is selected based at least in part on a characteristic associated with the caller.

[c16] 16. The method of Claim 14, wherein the at least one targeted advertisement is selected based at least in part on a characteristic associated with the unavailable number.

[c17] 17. The method of Claim 1, further including the step of providing at least one advertisement to the caller.

[c18] 18. The method of Claim 17, wherein the at least one advertisement includes at least one generalized advertisement.

[c19] 19. The method of Claim 17, wherein the at least one advertisement includes at least one targeted advertisement.

[c20] 20. The method of Claim 19, wherein the at least one targeted advertisement is selected based at least in part on a characteristic associated with the caller.

[c21] 21. The method of Claim 19, wherein the at least one targeted advertisement is selected based at least in part on a characteristic associated with the unavailable

number.

22. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the steps of:
receiving information from the caller representative of a desired subscriber;
identifying at least one subscriber being at least substantially similar to the
desired subscriber; and
providing information associated with the at least one identified subscriber to
the caller.

23. The method of Claim 22, wherein the information associated with the
identified subscriber is one of a group consisting of: a telephone number; an
identifier; and a location.

24. The method of Claim 22, further comprising the steps of:
receiving input from the caller indicating a selection of an identified subscriber;
and
connecting the caller to a telephone number associated with the selected
subscriber.

25. The method of Claim 1, wherein the unavailable number includes a non-
existent number.

26. A method to provide directory assistance to a caller attempting to place a
telephone call to an unavailable telephone number, the method comprising the
steps of:
receiving, at an intercept system, the telephone call placed to an unavailable
telephone number;
notifying the caller of an unavailability of the unavailable telephone number;
prompting the caller with an option of engaging a directory assistance service;
and
automatically routing, at the intercept system, the telephone call to the
directory assistance service.

27. The method of Claim 26, further including the steps of:
determining, at the directory assistance service, information associated with the
unavailable telephone number; and

taking an action based at least in part on the associated information.

[c28]

28. The method of Claim 27, wherein the step of taking an action includes providing the information to the caller.

[c29]

29. The method of Claim 27, wherein the step of determining the information includes the steps of:
determining an unavailable subscriber represented by the unavailable telephone number;
determining an available subscriber having a characteristic at least similar to a characteristic of the unavailable subscriber; and
obtaining information associated with the available subscriber.

[c30]

30. The method of Claim 29, wherein the step of taking an action includes providing the information associated with the available subscriber to the caller.

[c31]

31. The method of Claim 29, wherein the characteristic of the unavailable subscriber includes an identifier of the unavailable subscriber and the characteristic of the available subscriber includes at least a similar identifier.

[c32]

32. The method of Claim 29, wherein the characteristic of the unavailable subscriber includes a classification of the unavailable subscriber and the characteristic of the available subscriber includes a classification of the available subscriber at least similar to the classification of the unavailable subscriber.

[c33]

33. The method of Claim 26, further comprising the step of providing at least one advertisement to the caller.

[c34]

34. The method of Claim 33, wherein the at least one advertisement includes at least one generalized advertisement.

[c35]

35. The method of Claim 33, wherein the at least one advertisement includes at least one targeted advertisement.

[c36]

36. The method of Claim 35, wherein the at least one targeted advertisement is selected based at least in part on a characteristic associated with the caller.

[c37]

37. The method of Claim 35, wherein the at least one targeted advertisement is

selected based at least in part on a characteristic associated with the unavailable number.

[c38]

38. The method of Claim 26, wherein the step of prompting the caller with the option of engaging a directory assistance service includes one of a group consisting of: prompting the caller with an option of paying a fee in exchange for a provision of the directory assistance service and prompting the caller with an option of listening to at least one advertisement in exchange for a provision of the directory assistance service.

[c39]

39. The method of Claim 26, wherein the directory assistance service is one of a group consisting of: a local directory service, a regional directory service, a national directory service, an international directory service, and a specialized directory service.

[c40]

40. The method of Claim 26, wherein the unavailable number includes a non-existent number.

[c41]

41. A system for providing directory assistance to a caller attempting to place a telephone call to an unavailable telephone number, the system comprising: a directory assistance service; and an intercept system coupled to the directory assistance service, wherein the intercept system is adapted to intercept the erroneous telephone call made to the unavailable telephone number and to route the erroneous telephone call to the directory assistance service.

[c42]

42. The system of Claim 41, wherein the directory assistance service is one of a group consisting of: a local directory service, a regional directory service, a national directory service, an international directory service, and a specialized directory service.

[c43]

43. The system of Claim 41, wherein the directory assistance service is adapted to provide information associated with the unavailable telephone number to the caller.

[c44]

44. The system of Claim 43, wherein the information associated with the

unavailable telephone number includes information related to an unavailable subscriber associated with the unavailable telephone number.

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[c45]

45. The system of Claim 44, wherein the information associated with the unavailable telephone number further includes information associated with an available subscriber having a characteristic at least similar to a characteristic of the unavailable subscriber.

[c46]

46. The system of Claim 45, wherein the characteristic is one of a group consisting of: a classification and a geographical location.

[c47]

47. The system of Claim 41, wherein the directory assistance service further is adapted to provide at least one advertisement to the caller.

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[c48]

48. The system of Claim 47, wherein the at least one advertisement includes at least one generalized advertisement.

[c49]

49. The system of Claim 47, wherein the at least one advertisement includes at least one targeted advertisement.

[c50]

50. The system of Claim 49, wherein the director assistance service is further adapted to select the at least one targeted advertisement based at least in part on a characteristic associated with the caller.

[c51]

51. The system of Claim 49, wherein the director assistance service is further adapted to select the at least one targeted advertisement based at least in part on a characteristic associated with the unavailable number.

[c52]

52. The system of Claim 41, wherein the intercept system further is adapted to prompt the caller with the option of engaging a directory assistance service.

[c53]

53. The system of Claim 52, wherein the intercept system further is adapted to prompt the caller to authorize a fee for a provision of the directory assistance service.

[c54]

54. The system of Claim 41, wherein the directory assistance service is further adapted to:
receive information from the caller representative of a desired subscriber;

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identify at least one subscriber being at least substantially similar to the desired subscriber; and
provide information associated with the at least one identified subscriber to the caller.

[c55] 55. The system of Claim 54, wherein the information associated with the identified subscriber is one of a group consisting of: a telephone number; an identifier; and a location.

[c56] 56. The system of Claim 41, wherein the directory assistance service is further adapted to:
receive input from the caller indicating a selection of an identified subscriber;
and
connect the caller to a telephone number associated with the selected subscriber.

[c57] 57. A directory assistance service for providing directory assistance to a caller attempting to make a telephone call to an intended recipient at an unavailable telephone number, the directory assistance service being coupled with a telephone network and comprising:
telephony equipment adapted to receive a telephone call from the telephone network;
at least one database including intended recipient related information associated with the unavailable telephone number; and
means for providing at least some of the intended recipient related information to the caller.

[c58] 58. The directory assistance service of Claim 57, further including:
means for intercepting the telephone call; and
means for routing the telephone call to the telephony equipment.

[c59] 59. The directory assistance service of Claim 58, wherein the means for intercepting the telephone call includes an automatic intercept system.

[c60] 60. The directory assistance service of Claim 57, further including means for providing at least one advertisement to the caller.

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- [c61] 61. The directory assistance service of Claim 60, wherein the at least one advertisement is a generalized advertisement.
- [c62] 62. The directory assistance service of Claim 60, wherein the at least one advertisement is a targeted advertisement.
- [c63] 63. The directory assistance service of Claim 62, further comprising means for selecting the at least one targeted advertisement based at least in part on a characteristic associated with the caller.
- [c64] 64. The directory assistance service of Claim 62, further comprising means for selecting the at least one targeted advertisement based at least in part on a characteristic associated with the unavailable number.
- [c65] 65. The directory assistance service of Claim 60, wherein the means for providing the at least one advertisement to the caller includes:
an advertisement database having at least one advertisement;
means to search the advertisement database for a desired advertisement; and
means to convert the desired advertisement from data into synthesized speech.
- [c66] 66. The directory assistance service of Claim 57, wherein the at least one database includes:
an intercept database having at least one entry, each entry corresponding to an unavailable telephone number, and wherein each entry includes at least one field of information associated with the corresponding unavailable telephone number; and
means for obtaining information from the at least one field of an entry of the intercept database associated with the unavailable telephone number.
- [c67] 67. The directory assistance service of Claim 66, wherein the at least one database further includes:
a directory assistance database having at least one entry, each entry corresponding to an available telephone number, and wherein each entry includes at least one field of information associated with the corresponding available telephone number; and
means for identifying an entry of the directory assistance database

corresponding to an available telephone number having a characteristic at least similar to a characteristic of the unavailable telephone number.

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[c68]

68. The directory assistance service of Claim 67, wherein the characteristic is one of a group consisting of: a subscriber identifier, a subscriber classification, and a subscriber location.

[c69]

69. The directory assistance service of Claim 67, wherein the means for providing the information to the caller includes means for providing information from the at least one field of information associated with the available telephone number having the characteristic at least similar to the characteristic of the unavailable telephone number.

[c70]

70. The directory assistance service of Claim 57, wherein the means for providing the intended recipient related information includes:
means for converting the intended recipient related information into synthesized speech; and
means for providing the synthesized speech to the caller.

[c71]

71. The directory assistance service of Claim 57, wherein the means for providing the intended recipient related information includes means to provide a recorded message to the caller.

[c72]

72. A method for providing alternate information during a directory assistance call, wherein a caller to the directory assistance requests information associated with an unavailable number, the method comprising the steps of:
determining a first characteristic of an intended recipient associated with the unavailable number;
identifying an available subscriber associated with an available number, the available subscriber having a second characteristic at least similar to the first characteristic; and
providing information associated with the available subscriber to the caller.

[c73]

73. The method of Claim 72, wherein the intended recipient is the available subscriber.

- [c74] 74. The method of Claim 72, further including the step of identifying the intended recipient.
- [c75] 75. The method of Claim 74, wherein the step of identifying the intended recipient includes searching a database having a plurality of entries corresponding to a plurality of unavailable numbers, and wherein each of the plurality of entries include information associated with a corresponding intended recipient.
- [c76] 76. The method of Claim 72, wherein the first characteristic includes a geographic location and the second characteristic includes at least a similar geographic location.
- [c77] 77. The method of Claim 72, wherein the first characteristic includes a first classification and the second characteristic includes a second classification at least similar to the first classification.
- [c78] 78. A telephone intercept system for intercepting an attempted telephone call to an unavailable number comprising:
means to detect an attempted telephone call to the unavailable number; and
means to automatically route the attempted telephone call to a directory assistance service.
- [c79] 79. A telephone system for providing directory assistance service to a caller attempting to place a telephone call to an unavailable telephone number, the telephone system comprising:
a directory assistance service;
a telephone adapted to place a telephone call to a telephone number;
a telephone network coupled to the telephone and the directory assistance service, the telephone network adapted to intercept the telephone call and automatically route the telephone call to the directory assistance service when the telephone number is an unavailable telephone number.
- [c80] 80. The telephone system of Claim 79, wherein the telephone network includes a central office coupled to the telephone, wherein the central office is adapted to intercept the telephone call.

[c81]

81. The telephone system of Claim 80, wherein the central office further is adapted to route the telephone call to the directory assistance service.

[c82]

82. The telephone system of Claim 80, wherein the central office is local to the telephone.

[c83]

83. The telephone system of Claim 80, wherein the central office is remote to the telephone.

[c84]

84. The telephone system of Claim 79, wherein the telephone network includes a point-of-presence of a long distance carrier coupled to the telephone, wherein the point-of-presence is adapted to intercept the telephone call.

[c85]

85. The telephone system of Claim 84, wherein the point-of-presence further is adapted to route the telephone call to the directory assistance service.

[c86]

86. The telephone system of Claim 79, wherein the telephone network includes an intercept system coupled to the directory assistance service, where the intercept system is adapted to intercept the telephone call and to route the telephone call to the directory assistance service.

[c87]

87. The telephone system of Claim 79, wherein the directory assistance service is one of a group consisting of: a local directory service, a regional directory service, a national directory service, an international directory service, and a specialized directory service.

[c88]

88. The telephone system of Claim 79, wherein the telephone network is one of a group consisting of: a public switched telephone network, a private branch exchange, an integrated services digital network, a fiber distributed data interface telephone network, a wireless telephone network, and a satellite telephone network.

[c89]

89. A method for provided advertising, the method comprising the steps of: detecting a caller's telephone call; intercepting the telephone call; providing at least one advertisement to the caller.



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